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ABSTRACT

The changing demographics of educational administration students and the resulting changes in academic advising are examined in this paper. Personal experiences, observations, and informal talks with hundreds of professors, graduate students, and practitioners are the basis for the research. The intent of the paper is not to provide descriptions of the changing students or of graduate academic advisement or to provide solutions to either the issues or the problems raised, but to provoke discussion of the situation and suggest possible explanation of the changing patterns of counseling. (SI)

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CHANGING DEMOGRAPHICS:
CHANGING PATTERNS OF ACADEMIC COUNSELING

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National Conference of Professors of Educational Administration
University of Alabama
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CHANGING DEMOGRAPHICS: CHANGING PATTERNS OF ACADEMIC COUNSELING

Presented to: The "Big Picture" Interest Group
National Conference of Professors of Educational
Administration
University of Alabama
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Last year, at Kalamazoo, Dr. Rosemary Pappalewis asked me to consider making a presentation to the "Big Picture" Interest Group. There are many things in the "big picture" which intrigue me, such as: the National Commission on Excellence recommendations; the changing positions of A.A.S.A. and N.A.S.S.P., the new NCATE procedures and standards; the impending retirement of many, if not most, of us; the changing demographics of public schools; and the arrival in power of the "new right." After much reflection, I chose the changing demographics of educational administration students and the resulting changes in academic advising as the topic for this presentation. I made this choice because it interested me, because few have addressed it formally, but many have mentioned it informally, and because a remark I made about "the baby boom generation," at Flagstaff has attracted so much attention.

This presentation is not research based. Rather, it is the result of my experience, of observation, and of informal talks with hundreds of professors, graduate students, and practitioners.

When I was a graduate student at Florida 25 years ago, there were few minority students and fewer women enrolled in school administration. Graduate students kept their distance from their advisors and/or professors. Academic counseling was quick, efficient, and often brusque in nature. Students did not schedule appointments with professors unless absolutely necessary and they certainly never just "dropped by the office." Personal

matters were just that - personal - they were not ever discussed with one's advisor. There may have been some student that discussed academic failure, divorce, financial problems, sexual dysfunctions, harassments, or other personal matters with their advisors, but I never heard of it. The graduate students in educational administration were men and they were expected to act like it!

When I first came to Mississippi State 23 years ago and began to teach educational administration, all of the students were men but one and she had a vocabulary like an artillery sergeant! I had one black male student (also a token faculty member) and the one woman previously mentioned. She was tough enough to call the black man a "Black S.O.B." the first night of class and he was gentleman enough to take it! One could teach the principalship in curse words if one so chose without fear of offending anyone. The overwhelming majority of the graduate students were working on a master's degree or just adding certification. Specialists and doctoral students were the exception, not the rule. Most professors of educational administration, everywhere, were in their forties or fifties. Academic advisement was quick, business like, to the point, impersonal, and pretty nearly antiseptic.

Most students' career goals were well thought-out, local, and relatively easily attained. The state required only three or four specific courses for certification. Thus, most of many programs was electives. There was little specialization. People got certified as school administrators and that was that. No student ever told me anything about his personal life! He did not discuss his finances, his love life, his

bouts with alcoholism, the death of his wife, the kind of car he drove or why he wanted to major in educational administration. Nearly all of them knew what they wanted, knew where they would work, had a job already promised to them, and were ready for it. Many were already administrators.

What a change the years have brought! Now, the majority of my advisees are doctoral students. Well over half of all enrollees in my classes are members of an ethnic minority, women, foreign nationals, or all of the above. My advisees are similar. Most present day students compare favorably with those of earlier years academically. However, few of today's students have immediate and/or local goals, few have any experience in educational administration, and most are rebuilding their lives because of divorce, death, career changes, or other catastrophe. Most take countless hours of your time discussing their personal affairs as well as their rather vague and far-in-the-future career goals.

I, and others, have sought to understand why it takes three times as much time to advise a student now as it did back then. Is it because we are older? Is it because they are women, Black, Hispanic, or Foreign? Is it because they are stressed/distressed? Is it because graduate programs have changed along with calls for excellence, criticisms of our departments, changes in certification, or lack of appropriate experience of candidates? Is it because graduate education has changed? I suspect that some mix of all these factors, and others, enter into the changing patterns of academic counseling which have emerged along with the changing demographics of the graduate students. The intent of this paper is not to provide descriptions of the changing students or of graduate academic advisement. Nor is it the

intent of this paper to provide solutions to either the issues or the problems raised. Rather, its intent is to provoke discussion of the situation. Knowledge of cause and effect in these changing conditions would, I think, be helpful to us. One of my doctoral students recently suggested a possible explanation of the changing patterns of counseling which has certainly captured my interest as a possible cause. I will simply share it with you. She said that the cause doesn't lie mainly with the demographics of women, minorities, foreign nationals, or our ages. Rather, she asserted that "Baby Boomers" are more open, more conditioned to talk about personal matters, and that they expect others to listen to their concerns however far-fetched they may be, however personal they are, and however poorly formulated they are! What do you think? Could it be that the "Baby Boomers" are not only the first generation of humans not needed by the previous generation; but, also the first generation to demand that those in authority listen to their concerns, interminably, ad nauseam, whether the concerns be vital or legitimate or not?